

The fourth thing that it does is it increases disclosure, or it increases information to the American public. It increases information that is available to them on how much candidates spend, on where they get their contributions, more timely disclosure. When it comes to issue groups that influence our political process, it increases information available to the public as to who the group is and how much money they are spending if it is on radio or television. That is what is Constitutional; that is what the courts will allow us to do in a constitutional framework without violating anyone's freedom of speech. That is what the legislation does. It is very simple, straightforward and bipartisan.

What is unique about this legislation that sets it apart from other items of legislation that are being offered in this body? First of all, it is the result of a bipartisan process. We as freshmen, the Democrats and Republicans, met together for 4 months coming up with this legislation. The gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) was my Democrat counterpart that worked so diligently on this, and the gentleman from Montana (Mr. HILL) I see here in this body that supports this and helped us produce this. So it is unique legislation, we have worked hard on it, we are grateful to the leadership for giving us the encouragement and bringing this to a vote in March on the floor.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. BISHOP) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BISHOP addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

BIPARTISAN CAMPAIGN INTEGRITY ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Montana (Mr. HILL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HILL. Mr. Speaker, I want to join my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HUTCHINSON) in rising today to speak about the Bipartisan Campaign Integrity Act. I first want to acknowledge the hard work and leadership that he has provided in helping us bring this measure forward. This process started out with 6 freshmen Republicans, 6 freshmen Democrats who decided to form a task force, study the problems with campaign finances, and definitely a bipartisan proposal and a bipartisan solution to the problem. Mr. HUTCHINSON has provided outstanding leadership in helping us bring it this far. From that group of 12 people, we now have 74 cosponsors of the Bipartisan Campaign Integrity Act.

I want to remind my colleagues what the problem is. The problem that we have is soft money. Soft money is out of control. Just 4 years ago, 5 years ago

now, both political parties, Democrats and Republicans, raised about \$35 million in soft money. In the last campaign cycle, they raised about \$270 million in soft money. Labor unions added over \$100 million more to the process. Soft money is out of control. All we have to do is read the headlines about the problems that are going on in the White House, or in both political parties, and the influence that labor unions and corporations have over the political process now because of the excesses of soft money.

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I want to remind my colleagues what soft money is, because as candidates we cannot accept soft money. What soft money is is funds that come from corporations, from labor union dues, and wealthy individuals that is in excess of contribution limits that they can make now.

Substantially, this money is unreported. We do not know where it comes from and, for the most part, we do not know how it is spent. But we can ban soft money in our political parties and not limit the right of individuals to speak out on issues.

As candidates, we are affected by soft money, because independent groups often spend huge sums of money to try to influence the political process, either in support of where we stand or in opposition to where we stand.

What can we do? Well, we can begin by supporting the bipartisan Campaign Integrity Act. It bans soft money, and it does make it easier to raise the good money, which we call hard money.

We also need to make sure that workers have the right to choose whether or not they want to contribute to the political process and to protect them from those abuses by supporting the Paycheck Protection Act, and we can give members of other organizations that same right of protection.

Mr. Speaker, the American people want us to reform campaign finance; and if we talk to the Members of this House privately, they all believe that we need to reform it and that we ought to reform it. The problem is that the majority of the American people doubt that we actually have the courage and the conviction to get it done.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge my colleagues today to join as cosponsors of the bipartisan Campaign Integrity Act and the Paycheck Protection Act. We need to ban soft money. We need to protect workers. We can do this job when this comes to the floor in 6 weeks. I urge my colleagues to support it.

STOP MEDICARE OVERPAYMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to request my colleagues' support for leg-

islation I introduced yesterday to save the Medicare program almost half a billion dollars a year in unnecessary overpayments for prescription drugs.

As the only pharmacist in the 105th Congress, let me first state that the price of these drugs is not due to the family pharmacist. The high price is set by the pharmaceutical manufacturers.

Making the situation even worse, under current Medicare law, the program reimburses doctors who prescribe covered drugs for 95 percent of the "sticker price" quoted by pharmaceutical manufacturers, rather than the actual cost to the doctor of acquiring the drug.

Furthermore, Medicare pays doctors for the cost of their expenses, overhead, consultation time, and for administering the drugs under the practice expense system, not to mention the close to \$7 billion that Medicare spends each year to educate our Nation's doctors.

A recent analysis by the Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General shows that Medicare is wasting millions each year under the current system, \$447 million alone in 1996.

Our patients deserve better. The Stop Medicare Overpayment Act, based on the President's fiscal year 1999 budget and included in a comprehensive anti-fraud proposal introduced by the gentleman from California (Mr. STARK) last year, will go a long way toward establishing a fair and adequate payment system.

The Stop Medicare Overpayment Act is simple: Reimburse the doctors for what they paid for the drug. They already get paid for their office overhead, dispensation and "professional services" through the Medicare system. Why allow a small group of persons to reap a \$447 million windfall benefit each year?

Seventy-five percent of the cost of these overpayments are coming directly out of the taxpayers' wallet. Twenty-five percent come directly from senior citizens who are forced to pay a higher Part B premium.

My legislation will go a long way toward ending these overpayments. Unfortunately, it will not do anything to address the root of this problem: the high cost of prescription drugs charged by pharmaceutical companies.

It is indeed unfortunate that here in the world's richest nation our seniors should be forced to choose between buying food or buying prescription drugs and that our pharmacies should be discriminated against by drug manufacturers.

As Congress considers ways in which to reduce the \$23 billion in Medicare fraud and abuse, my legislation should be first on the list. It is a sensible, responsible, and prudent approach to rein in unnecessary Medicare costs.

I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this important initiative.